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A Paper for the
SYMPOSIUM ON TRAINING OF FIELD STAFF IN HOME-BASED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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THE FAMILY DAY CARE CONSULTANT: THE INVENTION OF A STRATEGIC CATALYST
TO UPGRADE THE QUALITY OF FAMILY DAY CARE HOMES.

Summary

The introduction of the Family Day Care Consultant, a paraprofessional at mid-career level (AA) as a member of the staffing pattern of Family Day Care Units, has as its primary goal upgrading the quality of care given to children in day care homes.

The Consultants selected primarily for their successful experiences as Family Day Care Mothers, working under direct supervision of a Coordinator, will be engaged in a work-study program (50-50) that will have a strong interdisciplinary focus of blending some aspects of Family Studies, Early Childhood Development and Social Work.

Based for their work in the neighborhood, they will provide a range of direct services to teach Family Day Care Mothers ways aimed at stimulating an enriched program for children; serve as a source of crisis intervention and referral; link group day care resources more closely to those of family day care; facilitate the flow of information between users and providers; gather data and assess the emerging needs of Family Day Care Mothers for program development; and undertake some community activities to deal with the problems of children in unlicensed homes.

Background: The Scope of the Problem

Family Day Care is the principal method of day care for working mothers in low income working class and minority neighborhoods. National statistics reveal that more than 90% of working parents' children under 6 years of age who are cared for outside of their own homes are placed in family day care situations.

A publication¹ from the Children's Bureau Child Care Arrangements of Working Mothers in the United States revealed that care in the family home was the first choice, followed by care in someone else's home, regardless of the children's ages. Relatively few women expected to use day care centers. In a recently completed six state study² which included the state of Minnesota, the unemployed mothers on AFDC declared the same preference for child care arrangements as those of the average working mother.

The dimensions of the efforts needed in providing adequate child care arrangements is revealed in the following figures provided by the Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor³. In March, 1972, 12.7 million mothers were in the work force, an 8 fold increase from 1940. One out of three have children under the age of six. (A forecast projects a 32% increase between 1975 and 1985 in the population of mothers with children under the age of five who will be in the labor force.)

How are these children of working parents, most of them in the lower third of our economic levels, cared for? Almost half of the pre-school children in a recent study conducted by the Child Welfare League of America⁴ were cared for in their homes; not quite a third in day care home situations and finally only a little more than 5% in group day care centers. The remainder were cared for in a variety of arrangements, many of which included being taken care of by the mother while she worked. The proportion of children

¹Seth Low and Pearl G. Spindler, Child Care Arrangements of Working Mothers in the United States (Washington: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Social and Rehabilitation Service, Children's Bureau, and U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Labor Standards Administration, Women's Bureau), Children's Bureau Publication No. 461, 1968, pp. 15-16.

²Betty Burnside, "The Employment Potential of AFDC Mothers in Six States", Welfare in Review, HEW, Social and Rehabilitation Service, July-August, 1971, p. 17.

³1970 Census Data (Fourth Count), Employment Characteristics, Minnesota Analysis and Planning System.

⁴Child Welfare League of America. Child Care and Working Mothers: A Study of Arrangements Made for Daytime Care of Children. Florence A. Ruderman. New York, 1968.

of working parents who are in licensed family day care homes are estimated to be less than 10%.

One must pause here momentarily to note that family day care homes continue to be the preferred resource despite the mushrooming of day care centers.

Our own survey for this question brought out the following observations: Flexibility of the Family Day Care situation is the overriding advantage and this we expressed in the following ways:

1. Family Day care minimizes the transportation difficulty for low income mothers.
2. It provides some supervision for school-age children and permits these children to remain in their own neighborhoods.
3. It permits siblings to remain together.
4. Family day care mothers provide an intimacy that is regarded as not available in Day Care Centers, especially for those children under three and those who might have some special problems. Parents view individualized attention as the most desirable advantage of family day care.
5. It is less expensive than other alternatives.

A pervasive attitude of distrust in low income communities for "institutional" day care centers is implied in many responses. "The parking lot" stigma is still attached, generally, to this kind of child care. Informal opinions on the rigidity of centers, (inability to handle mild emergencies thus disrupting the working day of mothers) inadequate facilities, crowding, inadequate staffing are woven into the expressed negative feelings.

Finally, the use of family day care is frequently understood to be an income sharing device especially where children are placed with relatives or close friends. In our own informal exchanges with parents who preferred family day care, many indicated that the financial need of relatives or neighbors played a major role in their choice.

Despite the widespread use of family day care the quality of this care is shockingly uneven. It ranges from an environment of creative and stimulating

warmth to reported situations of neglect and abuse that frequently borders on the criminal. For a vast majority of family day care situations we have no documentation whatsoever since the estimated number of such homes that are licensed fall between 1 and 10%.

A few summary observations on the lack of a support system:

1. While Family Day Care has the greatest use, it has the least quality control. Even in the case of licensed homes, there are limitations since licensing criteria are primarily concerned only with physical details such as safety and hygiene.
2. There is currently little, if any, provision of supportive services to the licensed family day care mother. In this community, licensed FDC homes are visited perhaps once or twice a year for a routine visit by the overburdened day care staffs of Ramsey and Hennepin County Welfare Departments.
3. There is virtually no quality control over the day care of thousands of children that are informally placed in homes throughout the metropolitan area without even the minimum protections afforded by licensing.
4. The opportunities for training for the providers of family day care are sparse and often inaccessible.
5. There is a lack of systematic information between the users and providers of family day care. Parents lack sound information on which to base an informed choice for appropriate day care services and many women providing family day care are unaware of licensing procedures.

Despite these problems, family day care will be seen in the foreseeable future as an essential and inevitable component of a comprehensive day care program: to offer parents alternatives; to offer an intimate environment for infants and very young toddlers; to create a supplementary service for schoolage children and to deal flexibly with the special needs of both children and their working parents.

As a response to these community needs we have proposed a project that embraces a three-fold development.

1. The use of mass media (TV and radio) as a medium for providing education and training in Early Childhood Education with the adjunctive use of group sessions, independent study and special seminars and workshops that will be delivered directly to the family day care mothers.

2. The establishment of a central and 5 satellite resource centers to be staffed and stocked in a way to enhance the competencies of the family day care mothers in each neighborhood; provide ongoing consultation and materials for loan, sites for seminars, and group projects in an easily accessible facility; and importantly, to provide a neighborhood base for the Family Day Care Consultant.
3. The development of a new career: The Family Day Care Consultant. It is to this aspect of the project that this paper will address itself.

The Challenge

Given the nature of the problems outlined above, the Family Day Care system, it seems to us, must move, irresistibly to "inventions" of staffing in order to ensure some quality.

If the Family Day Care unit of Ramsey County Welfare Department is at all typical of such enterprises around the country (and a cursory review tells us it is) an overworked staff confines itself only to basic licensing requirements, which consist of an initial investigation dwelling primarily on safety regulations, one visit a year, and crisis interventions. The meagre resources of the staff cannot be stretched to provide systematic training for the homebound family day care mothers, consultation on a range of formidable problems, and sustain the brokerage function between users and providers. Beyond the pervasive issue of securing some handle on quality control over the licensed day care mothers there is the nagging concern with the thousands of children tucked away in totally unsupervised situations. (There are in Ramsey County over 11,000 working mothers with children under 6, according to the 1970 census. However, there are only 900 licensed day care mothers and 1300 group day care places.)

Moreover, the background and experience of the professional staff has one major incapacitating feature: in Ramsey County they are chiefly social workers without any training in early childhood or in family sociology. This is not unusual. Most professional staffs of Family Day Care units lack an interdisciplinary focus to their training.

The Response

In our project, we are proposing the introduction of a Family Day Care Consultant, a paraprofessional, at a mid-career level (AA degree) who will have as a primary mission upgrading the quality of care given to children in Family Day Care homes.

The particular "consultant" that we are, as it were, inventing, is derived from the model, described in the paraprofessional literature as "relatively autonomous": i.e. assignment of tasks is made on the basis of the best performer, not on distinctions between "professional" and "paraprofessional" activities. This model stresses the uniqueness of abilities of the paraprofessional and emphasizes a fair degree of independence and high discretion in paraprofessional activity. (Note that the model we are proposing is not derived from that which selects a set of tasks for the paraprofessional that the professional considers "routine", "demanding less skill", "low level:", or "subordinate".) Because both members of our family day care team bring special capabilities to their differentiated tasks, we expect more of a collegial set of relationships to emerge than is the usual pattern in such arrangements. We have deliberately selected a model of a professional that is expected to operate in a team relationship with the paraprofessional, more or less as a peer, not as an underling in a hierarchical structure. It is our contention that the Family Day Care Consultant brings a unique set of capabilities, not usually shared by the professional, (successful experience as a Family Day Care Mother). They are intended to have the insiders know-how, the savvy and an intimate working knowledge of family day care and its strengths, weaknesses, and special problems and to use this experience to shape a practical, common sense approach to problems which, family day care mothers tell us, has been notably lacking in the meagre attention they have received from the professional staff.

A Functional Analysis of the Activities of the FDC Consultant

We are suggesting that the consultants will assume the following functions or roles:

1. Teacher: includes a range of activities from bringing and demonstrating play and learning equipment to the FDC home to direct interaction with the FDC mother designed to teach her how to influence a positive self-concept and enhance the child's nurturing environment.
2. Consultant: working with FDC mothers to increase their skills and competencies and coping capacities as well as providing help in the legal and fiscal management of the service.
3. Outreach Worker: an active searching out to detect problems in unlicensed situations and bring licensing to the attention of the community.
4. Broker: assessing the needs of the users and the qualities of the providers and providing appropriate possibilities of match.
5. Bridge: assuming a variety of linkage activities, primarily among users, providers, the FDC agency, the Resource Centers and the administrative staff of the project. (As a Bridge, they may of course get walked on by all sides, a paraprofessional hazard.)
6. Data Gatherer: gathering information from case data, statistical reports, related sources of community information and reporting these to appropriate persons for program development and evaluation.
7. Direct Supportive Services: this includes the supportive roles to users and providers which range from listening for simple morale purposes to direct intervention when crises demand it.

The Recruitment and Selection Process

Widespread publicity was given to the ten positions that would be opened to family day care mothers with a precise description of the nature of the work-study arrangement that would lead to an AA degree. An advisory committee made up of representatives from Early Childhood Development, the professional staff of the Family Day Care Unit in Ramsey County, family day care mothers, minority representation and two other disciplines which have taken an interest in the project, Social Work and Family Studies, developed the attached set of criteria. A process of self-selection was then initiated. Primarily this involved giving precise

information on the expectations of the position and specific information on the demanding nature of the tasks and responsibilities as well as the possibilities in this opportunity. This in fact narrowed the field considerably (from over 100 applications to 27). The process was further refined when we invited all the family day care mothers who remained in the running to come to a coffee party in order to have some interchange with the selection committee. At this meeting, even more detail was given and the questions and answers qualified even further the particular nature of the family day care consultant roles as we saw them, and the dimensions of the development of this aspect of our program. Finally, 23 expressed an interest in actually making appointments for an interview. Consistent questions¹ were proposed to the interviewee and the responses to these along with some background information and references from family day care mothers composed the core basis on which selections were made.

The screening committee was a diverse group reflecting the various constituencies that have a strong interest in this staffing pattern: i.e. a representative from the Family Day Care Unit, University representation, community representation, which included minority representation, the project director and three family day care mothers.

Out of the ten family day care consultants chosen, 9 had their high school diploma or equivalency, although this was not a requirement (this probably relates to the fact that Minnesota has the highest number of graduates in its population). Indeed to our surprise, most of these family day care mothers selected had some college in their background, varying from a few extension courses taken from supplementary Headstart Training to some who had had a systematic experience in training to be a nursery school teacher. Of the ten, three are minority persons. Generally they represent the diversity one sees in family day care mothers: ranging from suburban, rather "middle-class women", to women with a strong lower economic "working poor" background.
¹ See attachment #1.

Competencies as Training Objectives for the Family Day Care Consultants

From an extensive "assessment of needs" ¹ process we have summoned a fairly clear picture of the most pressing problems of the three major constituencies engaged in this project.

From the Family Day Care Mothers: A set of conflicts emerging from confusion of role (an extension of the parent? substitute? neutral caretaker?); severe behavioral problems and lack of understanding of dynamics and coping techniques in management; battered children; a range of difficulties with parents (immature single heads of households to children caught in the stresses of family break-up); conflicting standards of child rearing; ethical problems of confidential information.

These items are by no means exhaustive in an inventory that had a bewildering variety of troubling and perplexing problems.

From the Professional Staff: the need for neighborhood workers to deliver direct services and feedback for program development; some ideas on how to alert the community to the problems of unlicensed homes.

From the Users: information, awareness, and consumer guides on how to select this resource as well as help on alternative placements when appropriate.

From this assessment we view the consultant, at this time of program development, as one requiring some selected competencies derived from three disciplines: Social Work, Early Childhood, and Family Studies. Broadly speaking, from Social Work we would borrow an understanding of how individuals function in a social environment and the intervention techniques one can master in the helping process; from Early Childhood, an understanding of how children grow, learn and play and the implications of this for the Family Day Care environment and from Family Studies: patterns of child rearing and the changing family structures.

¹See attachment # 2.

Can we bring off this marvel of a hybrid? Despite the obvious complexities, we feel we have headed in the right direction by securing the cooperation of these three departments within the University to participate in the project and with an interdisciplinary staff we're off, at least, to a soaring start.

We are presently engaged in drawing up a set of "understandings" which we presume will be the framework for designing curriculum. This is a tentative outline of what we are considering.

1. Understanding the special characteristics of family day care mothers. While family day care mothers are of a mixed population with varying demographic profiles, two striking characteristics have come through to us.
 - a. The profound sense of isolation that most family day care mothers feel as they care for youngsters from sun up to sun down, very often without any break into the neighborhood or the life of the city. They are generally homebound and suffering from the characteristics of loneliness, touched off by a lack of adult companionship. It is our hunch that this contributes a great deal to the often expressed hostility and resentment they show to the working mothers who leave their children as charges, for in them they somehow see a role that they themselves wish they could escape to.
 - b. Perhaps linked to the former is a marked loss of self-esteem of family day care mothers as a group. They often refer to themselves as "only babysitters". They present themselves, as a group, as unloved and unloveable. A sense of grievance is a heavy undertone to their exchanges. They do not see their contribution to the care of children as an important community service. One of the interesting features of this is that since we began our TV program for family day care mothers the sense of excitement and improved self concepts from having an educational program directed to their needs and the attention they have been receiving both in the news and elsewhere has already begun to have an interesting contribution to their growing self confidence as competent women. The family day care consultants are not so distant from these feelings themselves that they cannot understand this situation but they must have some self examination of this in order to understand what behaviors might flow from the phenomena of isolation and self-depreciation.
2. Understanding the patterns of child care of working parents; single heads of households; a diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds and the implications of the changing nature of the family.

3. A wide range of understandings that embraces the behavior of children and coping techniques. These are frequently stated in the various competency statements now emerging and we will not restate them here.

The following is a beginning consideration of skills we are looking at:

1. Interviewing as a method in the helping process along with one-to-one relationship capabilities.
2. Communication skills with special attention to recording, reporting, and small group dynamics.
3. A knowledge of community resources and how to "broker" them for the users and the providers.
4. The capability of understanding how the concepts of child growth and development relate to the activities in the day care home and to the interactions between family day care mother, and child.
5. Applying the knowledge of safety, nutrition, health and other areas to the family day care situation.
6. Developing diagnostic skills, especially relating to danger signals in maladaptations of child behavior.
7. Developing a range of community organization capabilities that will help to develop an awareness of family day care resources, upgrading the consumer sophistication in purchasing this service and identifying for the program staff concerns that should be addressed in the development of the project.
8. Developing the capability of providing technical help in management concerns: bookkeeping, taxes, legal questions.

The Training Program for Family Day Care Consultants

This is being developed as a work/study model with the intention that 50% of the time will be spent out in the field based in the neighborhood facility of the resource center and 50% of the Consultant's time will be spent pursuing an educational goal of an AA degree with an interdisciplinary focus mentioned above. A tentative curriculum is available as our tentative plan for the framework of this portion of the project. It awaits refinement from the participants and a University-Community curriculum advisory committee.

Special Features

1. We are planning to do a considerable amount of co-training of the family day care consultants and the professional staff of the family day care unit so that the team concept can be developed and reinforced. Activities here will include attendance of the consultants at staff meetings, regular reporting procedures on the progress of the project and opening up the seminars to the family day care staff.
2. The ladder concept is basic to the model under consideration. At the AA degree, considered a mid-career level, we anticipate working with the Civil Service system in order to develop this as part of a new staffing pattern for Ramsey-County welfare board and the State Department of Public Welfare as a pattern for other county units. Credits earned in supplementary Headstart and other training programs will be reviewed and where appropriate will be the base upon which the family day care consultants can build. Other opportunities for work at this level are staffing in day care center operations, special needs, facilities for young children and community organization efforts in developing programs for family day care. The possibility of moving on to a BA level and beyond to fully professional goals is an essential concept. Details of the ladder from Family Day Care Mother to full professional development is apt to be worked out.
3. The methodology of the training program is lodged in the proposition that a core curriculum, electives and related coursework will be available through the more conventional sources of education at the University of Minnesota. The use of Special Topics (an accredited device for flexible curriculum initiatives) will enable us to improvise those seminar topics that emerge as the most useful topics of exploration as the projects develop. We also intend to use Independent Study for content that has a major focus on readings; laboratory equipment to acquire refined skills in interviewing techniques and communication skills; special workshops for specific acquisition of knowledge such as demonstration techniques in the use of play equipment. Seminars fusing the consultants work in the field with course-work within the university will be established.

Management of the Project (refer to available chart for overall organization of the project)

A coordinator will supervise the work in the community; advise in the curriculum choices and initiate activities (seminars, individual supervision) to fuse the two. (We have already begun to refer to this person as the Den Mother, rather Person!)

The Family Day Care Consultants, based in the neighborhood Resource Center, will have 50 licensed Day Care Mothers as their initial case-load. The level of activity will determine whether or not this should be narrowed or not.

The consultants will participate in all staff meetings, providing linkages to other aspects of the program.

Conclusion

This suggested project has the intention of shaping a staffing pattern that will not only enhance the quality of direct services to family day care mothers but provide the community with a capable and competent group of persons who will know how to link family day care resources and those of the day care centers into a relationship with each other for the benefit of the children of working parents.

We regard the Family Day Care Consultant as an essential but presently missing link in the gaps presented by licensed Family Day Care homes, Day Care Centers and the vast and somewhat invisible network of haphazard arrangements that are currently made by working parents.